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KURT SCHWITTERS (1887 – 1948): Collages, Paintings, Drawings, Objects, Ephemera

Tuesday, April 1 – Friday, May 23, 2003

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Reception: Monday, March 31st, 6:00 – 9:00 PM

**Ubu Gallery** announces its reopening at a new location – **416 East 59th Street** – with a solo exhibition of over 60 works by one of the great innovators of the 20th Century, **Kurt Schwitters**, a pioneer in the modern art forms of collage and assemblage. In the ferment immediately following World War I, art and words commingled – directly or indirectly – under the influence of Dada and artists and writers expressed their willful rejection of “bourgeois” values through collaborative exhibitions, performances and publications. No one was more obsessed with words – their meaning, sounds and appearance – than the Hannover, Germany-based Schwitters, who in all his endeavors – artist, poet, publisher, typographer, graphic designer, performer and lecturer – placed words firmly at his center. The joining of the visual and the verbal and the fantastic and the mundane was realized triumphantly in his Merzbilder, as Schwitters called the collages he began to make in 1919.

The Merzbilder were abstract works of art that combined bits of all conceivable materials – the waste of modern life – used tram tickets, stamps, odd bits of stationery and newspaper, torn photographs, wood, wire, fabric, candy and cigarette wrappers, packaging labels, etc. Originally a syllable taken from a letterhead reading Kommerz und Privatbank, the word Merz described beautifully the works Schwitters created from the abandoned detritus he rescued and resurrected. The artful balancing of colors, forms, textures and typographic elements made for brilliant, abstract compositions. The familiar materials of everyday life could be perceived as independent, aesthetic objects released from their mundane functions. The words or fragments thereof which appeared in the collages offered a wide range of allusive possibilities. In Schwitters' collages, each piece “represents” itself and a tension exists between what he called the “individual essence” (Eigengift) of the scrap and its role as a formal element in a delicately balanced composition. The evocative nature of the material lends each collage a distinctive character and mood.

Although Schwitters was clearly influenced by Dada ideas, he never officially joined a Dada group. By applying his own term Merz to his activities, he declared his personal independence. Toward the end of 1922, Schwitters established close friendships with the Dutch artist, Theo van Doesburg, the theorist and frontman of the de Stijl movement, and El Lissitzky, the Russian Constructivist. They were among an international group of artists who aimed at creating a universal art that was nonrepresentational, anti-individualist and built on basic geometric forms and principles. Their influence on Schwitters was considerable and his work after 1923 displays much of the geometric rigor of International Constructivism, as the amalgam of Russian Constructivism and Suprematism and the Dutch de Stijl movement has been dubbed.

Declared a “degenerate artist” by Hitler's regime, Schwitters was forced to leave Germany in 1937, settling first in Lysaker, Norway and, after the Nazis invaded Norway, in London in 1940. An unknown in a foreign land, his “words” stunted by war and exile, Schwitters' later works show his rebellious spirit tempered by a gentle wistfulness and a lyric order emerges from chaos.

**Adam J. Boxer**, a founding partner of Ubu Gallery, and **Hendrik A. Berinson** of Galerie Berinson, Berlin are pleased to announce their partnership in Ubu Gallery and to inaugurate their new location with this substantial gathering of works by such an overtly influential artist.